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4-H CLUB WORK CONTRIBUTES TO FAMILY LIVING

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In almost every case I've known 4-H club work adds to the joys of living. I've seen club work bring happiness, sorrow, the unexpected, rewards, and new experiences that seemingly affected the entire family. Happiness to my family when I actually learned to patch overalls and make pie crusts, sorrow when our pet dog invaded the chicken coop and devoured some club chickens, the unexpected when we discovered we had a health champ within our family circle, rewards when I first left Illinois to traverse European soil, and new experiences when parents find they can learn from their children.

Club work seems to emphasize the importance of the family working together. It brings common interests along with common problems to be solved. I shall never forget when my own brother first enrolled in a poultry club. At first he had only a few birds but soon he developed a large flock of purebred poultry. The rest of us were just as interested in the birds as he was--that is, in showing them off and caring for them when it rained, and speaking from experience I can say it really required cooperation when a storm came up. It seems as if chickens just can't become educated!

Closely connected with working together is the advantage of learning together. Most families agree that it is a pleasure to have a daughter prepare and serve a meal. And this skill can't be learned or accomplished in a day. However, I believe most families are willing to bear a few unsuccessful meals in the hope that the best is yet to come. Even fathers find their sons more interested in farming when the sons feel the pride of ownership and enter into competition with other club members. This sudden interest in club work relieves the parents and in the meantime the mothers and fathers find they have transferred some of their burdens and responsibilities to the children. It was amusing to me as I noted how my family became observant of things I had learned. I liked having my father criticize the color of my clothes as well as having my brothers comment on changes made in furniture arrangement even though the comments were sometimes due to rearrangement of neckties or shoe polish. These common interests tend to hold the family together and create a feeling of unity.

Several years ago my sister was offered a trip as a reward for achievement. I remember distinctly how the newspaper wrote it up--that she was homemaker for father, three brothers, and one sister, who was I. I was dreadfully humiliated. I couldn't figure it out. I had always tried to help in my small way and yet they called her the homemaker. Two years ago my sister married and as I took over the real responsibility for our home it dawned on me what a homemaker really was. It was a new experience for me and yet I feel that my seven years of club work helped fit me for this undertaking. I'll admit that my family was unusually patient and appreciative.

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Club members have many opportunities for personal development if they participate in the camps, exhibits, achievement days, training schools, and demonstrations. Parents enjoy being able to say their children saw this or were taught that in club work. I remember one father saying, "Well, my daughter didn't win many prizes but she surely got a lot out of club work." Some of the community clubs in my county have what is called "family night." Each family is supposed to furnish a stunt or some entertainment. In a good many instances the family seems to depend on the club members for ideas. This gives the club member an opportunity to put into practice things he has learned in club work as well as furnishing entertainment for the community. I've noticed that it is usually a group stunt rather than an individual performance by one member of the family. The families enjoy playing together. A family working together agreeably can have many good times, whether the task be planting a garden, preparing community club programs or house cleaning.

It's varied experiences that make living truly worth while--keep one always on the alert for something new. Each club member feels that he is the center of interest and the one benefitted--but it's an additional happy thought to realize that you are also helping your family to be contented and happy. Four-H club work aids in producing the kind of family living that I am reminded of when I read those well-known words "It takes a heap of living in a house to make a home."

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